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CHRISTIANIZING PATRIOTISM

Can a nation be Christian? Can patriotism be sacrificial? The answer which history gives is almost invariably negative.

Patriotism has preferred the Jehovah of the Judges to the Father of Jesus.

It has engraved Old Testament texts upon swords and has sanctified war by appeals to the conquest of Canaan.

But it has not taught its soldiers the Beatitudes or transfigured international relations by the spirit of Calvary.



Nations are partially Christian in their international relations, for even in the midst of war neutral peoples seek to help the victims of international strife. But noble as is this service, Christian patriotism cannot be satisfied with binding the wounded, feeding the starving, and sending Christmas presents to fatherless children. It must embody the teachings and spirit of Jesus in patriotism.

Patriotism will be Christian when nations share the sorrows, forgive the insults, and bear the injuries of other nations. In national as truly as in individual life no spirit is Christian until it ceases to be acquisitive and becomes sacrificially fraternal; until it seeks to give justice rather than to get justice.



At the present crisis two courses are open to the Christian church. It can instil the temper if not the philosophy of militarism by insisting in the name of Jehovah of the Cohorts that neutral countries must train their young men for battle. Already we hear the repetition of the teaching which the war has so bitterly discounted, that the only way of maintaining treaties is to back them up by armies.

For the church to champion such a policy would be religious atavism.

There is another and better course of action for the Christian church. It can aggressively educate people to maintain justice, love, fraternity, respect for other nations' rights to the point of sacrifice. It can engender the attitude of trust rather than that of distrust of other nations' good intentions. It can instil in the hearts of all true lovers of the country the thought that it is better for a country to stand unqualifiedly for spiritual values than for military force. And it may even dare to say that a nation as well as an individual is justified in taking up its cross and following its Lord.

Such sacrificial patriotism is impossible today, for the simple reason that national policies do not dare embody the spirit of Jesus. We do not dare trust one another because we distrust ourselves.

Perhaps we do not think Jesus' teaching is practical except in the petty details of life.



If we do not have full confidence in Jesus, let us say so frankly, protesting that he has no word for social activities and that his principles, while valid for individuals, are foolishness for nations.

But when we thus refuse to accept the teaching of Jesus as final, let us be consistent and stop speaking about his divine Lordship.

He has become merely an adviser of impracticabilities—a victim of his loyalty to his trust in a divine love that never existed.

We may well search our hearts as we face this test. If Jesus be what Christians insist that he is, his spirit of sacrificial service cannot be limited to any particular field of human life. If his teachings are inapplicable to nations, they are just as inapplicable to individuals who compose nations.

If we are to practice the vicarious life as individuals, we must also practice it as patriots.



What shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world and lose its own soul?